

Congressional and Public Affairs
Steven Cohen (202) 720-9113

FSIS ISSUES PUBLIC HEALTH ALERT FOR FROZEN, STUFFED, RAW CHICKEN PRODUCTS

WASHINGTON, July 3, 2006 – The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS), in collaboration with the state of Minnesota, has recently investigated illnesses associated with a class of frozen entrees that contain raw chicken. These frozen, breaded, boneless chicken products that may also be stuffed or filled and appear browned are raw and must be cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 165°F. Using a food thermometer is the only sure way of knowing your food has reached a high enough temperature to destroy foodborne bacteria.

Because these products are often stuffed or filled with additional ingredients, they may take longer to reach a safe minimum internal temperature of 165°F than chicken breasts that do not contain fillings.

FSIS believes that in some cases, consumers may not realize that the breading on these products has only been pre-browned and these frozen entrees contain raw chicken. FSIS is also concerned that consumers may not be following cooking instructions or that because of the variability of microwave ovens, the instructions may not yield a product that reaches an internal minimum temperature of 165°F.

FSIS is requiring that the manufacturers of these products ensure that new labels clearly state that these products contain raw chicken and must be fully cooked to a minimum internal temperature of 165°F. In addition, FSIS is taking steps to ensure that cooking instructions are effective, understandable and practical. Consumers should contact the manufacturer if following the cooking instructions yields a product that is unacceptable in terms of taste or texture.

Consumers with food safety questions can "Ask Karen," the FSIS virtual representative available 24 hours a day at http://www.fsis.usda.gov/Food_Safety_Education/Ask_Karen/index.asp#Question. The toll-free USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline 1-888-MPHotline (1-888-674-6854) is available in English and Spanish and can be reached from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. (Eastern Time) Monday through Friday. Recorded food safety messages are available 24 hours a day.

USDA Meat and Poultry Hotline
1-888-MPHOTLINE or visit
www.fsis.usda.gov

Products labeled with phrases such as "Cook and Serve," "Ready to Cook," and "Oven Ready" are intended to convey to the consumer that the product is raw or not ready-to-eat and must be fully cooked for safety. Although products may appear to be pre-cooked or browned, such products should be handled and prepared no differently than raw products.

Many frozen entrees containing stuffed boneless poultry products, such as a poultry product stuffed with cheese and other ingredients, are not-ready-to-eat and must be fully cooked as if they were raw.

Consumers must always follow the cooking instructions completely.

If using a microwave oven to cook meat and poultry products, be sure to take multiple temperature readings at different locations throughout the product due to the non-uniformity of the heating process and the creation of "cold spots." Because a microwave oven typically cooks product at non-uniform rates, it is important to ensure that the product is covered sufficiently for steam to build in the product, and that the product is set aside for a sufficient time for the heat to uniformly spread throughout the product at the completion of the microwave cycle. This will ensure that there are no "cold spots."

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NOTE: Access news releases and other information at the FSIS Web site at <http://www.fsis.usda.gov/>